

“Lincoln Hospital: the decline of health care”

Produced by Bruce Soloway

“And there’s a need for... total change, there’s a need to break down [the] system. In fact, a need to have a revolution, which is where we’re going, that’s what we’re working towards”

- Cleo Silvers, Think Lincoln Campaign

“...if you look at the health delivery system for poor people in this city today...it’s difficult to imagine how it could be worse or how it’s going to get much better without significant revolutionary input of a political nature”

- Dr. Edmund Rothschild of the New York City Health and Hospitals Corporation

“Lincoln Hospital: the decline of health care” was broadcast on WBAI radio in New York City on April 22, 1971, roughly a year after the community takeover of Lincoln Hospital (see Fitzhugh Mullan’s article “Seize the Hospital to Serve the People” on page 98 of this journal).

The documentary provides an opportunity to hear the voices of some of the people at the center of the struggle to reform – or revolutionize – one of New York City’s most dysfunctional hospitals. These voices include physicians (Drs. Martin Stein, Helen Rodriguez-Trias, Lewis Fraad, Arnold Einhorn, and Fitzhugh Mullan), a community activist (Cleo Silvers), administrators (Antero Lacot, Edmund Rothschild, Stanley Bergin) and several patients.

Much of the documentary focuses on the health issues of the Bronx and the inadequacies of the hospital. Dr. Lewis Fraad notes, for example: “Lincoln Hospital is full of lead poisoning. And until recently, we have seen children *get* lead poisoning while hospitalized at Lincoln Hospital.” Patients recount long waits in the Emergency Room.

But the issues raised by the documentary extend beyond the South Bronx of the 1970’s. There had been seven demands raised during the 1970

takeover: “the establishment of a permanent complaint table and a permanent day care center, immediate construction of the new Lincoln Hospital, a program of door-to-door preventive medicine, a drug detoxification program, a minimum wage for workers of a \$140/week, and finally the establishment of a community worker board with real power in the administration of the hospital.”

The seventh demand “started a great deal of debate.” And we are fortunate enough to hear some of that debate. What should be the nature of community and worker involvement in the running of a hospital? Who represents the community? What should be the nature of the relationships between the different workers in the hospital? How should teaching services be run? The documentary also touches on some of the innovative programs started at that time in the hospital.

Listeners should note that the radio documentary begins (without preamble) with an interview with Dr. Martin Stein and ends with the voice of a patient in the Lincoln Emergency Room.

The documentary – in MP3 format – can be found at our media gallery:

www.socialmedicine.org/media_page.htm.

The Editors

Acknowledgements:

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WBAI radio continues to be a progressive voice on the New York City radio dial and can be heard at www.wbai.org or 99.5 FM.

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